UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
14th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 13 November 1996
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

Chairman: Ms. CARAYANIDES (Australia)
(Vice-Chairman)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/51/SR.14
19 August 1997
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: RUSSIAN

96-82064 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic), Ms. Carayanides (Australia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 83: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued) (A/51/20 and A/51/276; A/C.4/51/L.7 and L.8)

1. Mr. BOECK (Austria), introducing draft resolutions A/C.4/51/L.7 and L.8, on behalf of the Fourth Committee's Working Group on International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, emphasized the balance struck in the draft declaration on international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for the benefit and in the interest of all States, taking into particular account the needs of the developing countries, which had been prepared on the basis of extremely detailed discussions and was set out in the annex to draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.7; the declaration would become the fifth document in the code of principles regulating activities in outer space adopted by the General Assembly and would constitute an important addition to the body of outer space regulations.

2. With regard to draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.8, he drew attention to the paragraphs concerning improvement of the working methods and enhancement of the effectiveness of the work of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), the recommendations on the priority questions to be considered by its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, in particular the question of space debris, and the recommendations concerning the convening of a special session of the Committee (UNISPACE III) and the preparations for it. He expressed the hope that both draft resolutions would be adopted by consensus.

3. Mr. WIBISONO (Indonesia) said that space science and the application of space technology were a sine qua non for achieving sustainable development, but the vast majority of nations, particularly the developing nations, were facing formidable obstacles in gaining access to advanced technology, knowledge and information in that field. The rapid commercialization of space activities was a further source of concern.

4. Indonesia had recognized the tangible benefits of space activities for the advancement of its national goals and had established its own satellite system for telecommunications and television broadcasting and was conducting work on remote sensing. Although its resources were limited, it offered other developing countries the opportunity of participating in various cooperation programmes on the peaceful uses of outer space. Its commitment to the objectives of cooperation had been reflected, in particular, in the holding in Indonesia in 1996 of the ninth meeting of the Expert Group on Remote Sensing of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in the organization of other events.

5. In view of the increasing significance of outer space activities in the overall development of the global community in an era of transition from

confrontation to cooperation, COPUOS had a special role to play in developing a framework to ensure the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from outer space activities. In that connection it was essential to underscore the need to strengthen the United Nations Programme on Space Applications. However, it was regrettable that the recommendations of the second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82) had not been fully implemented.

6. Indonesia welcomed the completion of the work on the draft declaration on international cooperation, which it regarded as an important milestone in the elaboration of the legal foundations for regulating outer space activities. It recommended that the General Assembly should adopt the document.

7. His delegation was pleased to note the constructive discussions on the working paper on the geostationary orbit submitted by Colombia. Along with other equatorial States, Indonesia had consistently emphasized the need for negotiations on that vital issue, particularly with regard to the establishment of a legal regime for the geostationary orbit which would take into account the interests of all States, especially those of the developing countries and including those of equatorial States.

8. The Indonesian delegation supported in principal the view that the third UNISPACE conference should be held before 2000 in order to formulate proposals for the next millennium.

9. With regard to the question of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, Indonesia believed that the work of COPUOS should complement the work done in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee of the General Assembly. Suitable practical mechanisms for coordinating the two bodies should be established.

10. With regard to the discussion of the working methods of COPUOS, the Indonesian delegation reiterated the position of the Group of 77 concerning compliance with the principles of equitable geographical representation and rotation of the membership of the bureaux of the Committee and its Subcommittees in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

11. Mr. LANDERAS (Cuba) said that COPUOS and its two Subcommittees had a special responsibility for ensuring that the developing countries which did not possess advanced space technology or sufficient resources could take advantage of the advances made in that area.

12. His delegation was in favour of the adoption of the draft declaration on international cooperation. The declaration was extremely important and would serve as the basis for effective and fruitful cooperation which would create equal conditions and opportunities for all. COPUOS was precisely the organ to strengthen that cooperation and it could also furnish support for the work on the prevention of the militarization of and an arms race in outer space.

13. The nature of the COPUOS report and the breadth of its treatment of the questions discussed was evidence of the accomplishment of serious work, and

Cuba, as a full member of COPUOS, confirmed its determination to continue to make a contribution to the attainment of the goals which had been set.

14. With regard to the organization of the work of COPUOS, his delegation supported the proposal that the duration of its sessions should be not less than five and a half weeks. It was also in favour of maintaining the necessary balance and ensuring rotation of the membership of the Committee's bureau on a regional basis. As in the past, the bureau should have five members, but those five places should rotate among the five geographical regions in order to ensure an equitable geographical distribution and the necessary transparency. The Committee's agenda should be expanded to include further items of general interest.

15. The Cuban delegation was in favour of the convening of a special session of the Committee (UNISPACE III), preferably in 1999, open to all Members of the United Nations.

16. Mr. GUANI (Uruguay) said that at the Third Space Conference of the Americas, held in the Uruguayan city of Punta del Este in November 1996, the American countries, China, Indonesia, the Russian Federation, Spain and Turkey had examined issues of regional cooperation with a view to finding applications for the achievements of space science and technology, and had considered the issues of sustainable development, the environment, space science and technology, education and communications. His delegation trusted that the text of the Punta del Este Declaration which had been adopted at that Conference would be circulated in the Committee. A space exhibition, featuring exhibits provided by the space agencies of the United States and the Russian Federation, had formed an extremely important backdrop to the work of the Conference.

17. Regarding the work of COPUOS, his delegation believed that its effectiveness should be enhanced and that budget restrictions should not hamper the work that was being carried out by its Subcommittees.

18. His Government hoped that a Latin American regional training centre for space science and technology would be established shortly. His delegation also wished to point out that the recommendation that an international conference on space-related issues should be held in 1999 or 2000 deserved full support; his Government would like the agenda of such a conference to include questions relating to the use of space technology in the interests of sustainable development, the environment and education.

19. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the peaceful uses of space and its related technologies were of great importance to the overall development of the Islamic Republic of Iran in view of their role in communications and data transmission, resource exploration, environmental monitoring and protection, tele-education, tele-medicine, weather forecasting and radio and television broadcasts. They were also important in ensuring sustainable development on an environmentally sound basis. The policies adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran would promote international cooperation and collaboration among Asia-Pacific countries within the framework of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

20. Member States should take more resolute steps to enable COPUOS to fulfil its task of preserving outer space for peaceful purposes, which could be achieved by creating a firm international framework based on further development of international space law and strengthening of international cooperation for the peaceful exploration and uses of outer space. To that end it was necessary to ensure transparency in outer space activities, as well as the exchange of data and equitable sharing of space benefits between developed and developing countries. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the adoption of the draft declaration on international cooperation and trusted that it would be adopted by the General Assembly by consensus. The Legal Subcommittee should be considered as the heart of COPUOS, and should be more active in developing international law for the exploration and peaceful utilization of outer space.

21. His delegation once again emphasized the competence of the Conference on Disarmament on questions relating to the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Since it was almost impossible to draw a clear line between peaceful and non-peaceful uses of outer space, a mechanism of cooperation and coordination should be established so that the work of the Conference on Disarmament could be complemented by that of the Committee.

22. On the question of regional centres for space science and technology education, his delegation welcomed the inauguration in November 1995 of the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific in New Delhi. Citing the amendment proposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the agreement establishing the Centre, his delegation expressed its conviction that approval of the proposed amendment would undoubtedly pave the way for realization of the Committee's objective.

23. His Government shared the common position of the Group of 77 on the issue of the working methods of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies and believed that the principles of rotation and equitable representation should apply in future elections to the Committee and its subsidiary bodies.

Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.7

24. Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.7 was adopted.

Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.8

25. Mr. NUÑEZ MOSQUERA (Cuba) said that during the previous day's meeting of the Working Group on International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, several delegations had expressed misgivings about the use in operative paragraph 10 of the phrase "notes with satisfaction" in combination with the part of the same paragraph which stated that "the Committee would evaluate the use of unedited verbatim transcripts". The opinion had been voiced that it would hardly be advisable for the General Assembly to note "with satisfaction" an event which had not yet taken place and that the current wording appeared to put pressure on COPUOS. Perhaps that at the current session the General Assembly should simply "note", and then "express satisfaction" at the next session.

26. Mr. BOECK (Austria) said that at the previous day's meeting, the members of the Working Group had agreed that the words "with satisfaction" applied to measures that had already been adopted, namely to those mentioned in document A/51/20, paragraph 208. As the Director of the Secretariat's Office for Outer Space Affairs had indicated, the savings that could be made by switching to unedited verbatim transcripts would be over $600,000 during one course of the biennium. That was why an understanding had been reached the previous day that the wording in question in no way predetermined the outcome of the evaluation process to be carried out by the Committee, and the draft resolution could be adopted in its present form. Delegations had been urged to act accordingly.

27. Mr. RIBEIRO (Brazil) said that the issue of unedited verbatim transcripts formed part of the larger question of the working methods of COPUOS, which had been a topic of discussion for the last two or three years. The issue involved, among other things, the question of whether to include new items which were of interest to members of the Group of 77 on the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee. For that reason, it had been proposed to leave the wording of paragraph 10 in its present form.

28. The CHAIRMAN said he took it that, if there were no objections, the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.8 in its present form.

29. Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.8 was adopted.

30. Ms. KATO (Japan) said that her delegation recognized that the transition to unedited verbatim transcripts would lead to savings and greater efficiency, and therefore questioned why separate records were needed for meetings of COPUOS and its Legal Subcommittee, especially in view of the fact that they produced a single report on their work. Her delegation had already stated its view at the Committee's thirty-ninth session, as reflected in paragraph 209 of its report (A/51/20). Her delegation had joined the consensus on resolution A/C.4/51/L.8 on the understanding that COPUOS would also evaluate that question at its fortieth session.

31. The CHAIRMAN said that he had received a request to publish the declaration and plan of action adopted at the Third Space Conference of the Americas held at Punta del Este (Uruguay) in 1996 as a document of the General Assembly. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the request.

32. It was so decided.

33. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 83.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

34. Mr. ATSKE-SELASSIE (Ethiopia), referred to the change in the Fourth Committee's programme of work whereby agenda item 86 on peacekeeping operations would be taken up on 18 rather than 15 November. He could think of no convincing reason for the rescheduling change, which had caused considerable disruption to his delegation's own programme of work, dictated as it was by the need to participate in the work of other General Assembly committees. He

therefore urged the Chairman and the Secretariat to keep to the agreed upon programme of work.

35. The CHAIRMAN said that the decision to reschedule consideration of agenda item 86 had been dictated by the fact that the list of speakers for 15 November was too short. In order to make optimum use of the Secretariat's resources, the first meeting on agenda item 86 had therefore been postponed to 18 November.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.